

## Despair and Hope--Chapter Eight

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Here's Chapter 8! Enjoy! Feedback is always appreciated.

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She sat quietly in the back of the small cafe, her coffee for the most part untouched and cooling by the second. She had chosen to sit in the back for solitary reasons, wishing to remain unseen. But still, the piteous glances she received from the cafe's few other occupants made her squirm uncomfortably.

Five years had passed, but the past always seemed to come back to haunt you.

She was further reminded of this when the beautiful, fiery redhead bounded in the door, followed closely by her blonde friend--Jack's sister.

Every occupant in the room seemed to be staring at Rose. It was understandable. Even if she weren't perfectly gorgeous with flowing, red hair that would turn anyone's head, she was the latest news. In small but growing communities like Chippewa Falls, everyone knew one another, and news got around fast. It had not taken Samantha long to hear of a mysterious, beautiful stranger showing up in town claiming to be the widow of the much-loved Jack Dawson. And now the news was going around that she is with child.

Not showing yet, Samantha observed as Rose and Lilly took their seats next to a cheerful window, early afternoon sun reflecting through the

glass and onto the small but pretty bouquet that adorned their table. She watched on as Rose lazily picked a small, purple flower from the bouquet. Rose gazed at it momentarily, a strange, thoughtful look on her face--almost as if she were remembering something . . .

And then the underlying sadness in Rose's eyes was revealed. It was a deep, melancholy sadness that would recover with time, but never really heal. It was the look of someone who had lost the most important thing in her life.

She watched as Lilly gently placed a hand on Rose's shoulder. She couldn't take it anymore. Rose wasn't the only person who carried a sadness over losing Jack Dawson. She was about to stand up and quietly exit when---

"How does it make you feel?"

She looked up into blue eyes--eyes as blue as the sea. "John," she said, slightly annoyed. "You startled me. I was just leaving---"

"You didn't answer my question." He indicated the redheaded woman on the far side of the room who was now in deep conversation with his sister.

Samantha swallowed slightly, running her slender hands through her dark hair. She looked from John to Rose, uncertain. "No, I don't like that he fell in love with another girl, but he was happy. That's what matters."

"Listen to you. You still talk like you and Jack had something."

She glared murder at him. "I had more with him than I'll ever have with you."

John flinched, visibly hurt by these words.

"It's your fault he left," she spat at him, attempting to keep her voice low. "If you hadn't been so selfish and pushed him away, he would probably still be alive right now." He could see the look of pain in John's eyes that her words caused. She felt no sympathy.

But this look passed, being replaced almost immediately by his deep-rooted bitterness. "What about you, Samantha? If you had just left him alone, Jack and I would never have fought. I'm the one who loved you. All Jack did was hurt you. And look--he left and found himself some snotty redheaded rich girl."

She shot him a puzzled look as he slid in the booth beside her. He leaned closer to her as her eyes searched his questioningly. "I found proof that Mrs. Rose Dawson over there isn't who she says she is." Each word he spoke was intentionally slow, allowing time for its meaning to sink in. "Rose DeWitt Bukater is a first class girl who was traveling with her mother and rich fiance on Titanic. I'm not exactly sure how Jack comes into the picture."

Samantha's eyes had widened with each word that came from John's mouth. She was now staring at Rose. "That means that her baby . . ."

He nodded. "Was conceived out of wedlock. Whether it is Jack's or her fiance's, I don't know. That baby is illegitimate, either way."

She suddenly looked at him sharply. "So what? How is this any of our concern?"

"I'm sure that her mother and fiance would like to know that their precious Rose is alive and well . . . and a little pregnant. I think we should telegram them."

"We? I'll have no part in this . . . this treachery."

He sighed, rolling his eyes in an exasperated manner. "Samantha, we won't be harming her. I'm sure she'll have a better life with them than she ever would here. Is it really that bad a thing? We'll actually be doing her a favor. Besides, do you really want to see her stay here, where she can constantly remind you that Jack gave her what he would never give you?"

Finally, Samantha did stand up. "This is low, even for you, John. You will never get over the fact that I loved Jack and not you, and now you're trying to use me as a pawn in one last attempt to get even with your dead brother."

She stormed from the cafe and into the bright summer sunlight, ignoring the feel of John's eyes burning into her back and the curious glances that were undoubtedly being given her by Rose and Lilly.

\* \* \*

He'd found it. It had to be her. Why he hadn't noticed it before, he wasn't sure, but there it was; the name 'Rose Dawson' stood out from the 'steerage' section of the survivor list like a sore thumb. Cal had referenced and cross-referenced, and had come across no other listings of a Rose Dawson on the Titanic--not even on the passenger list.

It could have been entirely coincidental. There were probably a thousand 'Rose Dawsons' in the world. But no other in connection with Titanic. It had to be her. He felt it with every instinct and every ounce of his being.

Rose was alive. He had known it all along, and he had been right. Caledon Hockley's lips twisted up in a wry grin--something that had not happened at all in the past two months.

"Caledon?"

Abruptly, Cal's grinned turned into a frown of annoyance. What could she possibly want now? "What is it, Ruth?" he asked sweetly, pulling his eyes from the stack of papers in front of him. Ruth was dressed in her robe and slippers--something she had been adorning more often since the sinking and Rose's disappearance. Her red hair was loose, delicate curls framing her lined face.

Cal thought that years ago she might have been beautiful like Rose. But time and the decisions she had been forced to make in life wore

on her, aging her prematurely, erasing her beauty with its cruelty.

"I wanted to tell you that a telegram has arrived for you from Wisconsin."

He gazed at her curiously, rising from his desk. "Wisconsin, you say?"

Ruth rolled her eyes slightly in a gesture of annoyance. "You know perfectly well that is what I said. Will you come read it, or do you wish me to?"

He glared at the back of her head as she turned and stormed from the room, thinking how ungrateful the wench was. He had taken her in when she had nowhere else to go. They both knew that her gambling husband had taken the money with him to the grave, leaving nothing but gambling debts hidden by the family name that went generations back in society.

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A mere ten minutes later, and Cal was in action. "Smith, fetch the car. We will leave immediately for the train station." He snapped this with all his commanding exuberance that he possessed. "Mr. Hockley, I demand to know where exactly you are going and what you are doing."

Caledon turned impatiently towards her. "Ruth, I am leaving for Wisconsin immediately. Please stay here. I will be back in a few days, and I think you will be pleased with what I bring back with me."

Ignoring the startled expression on her face, he bolted out the door without a glance back. It was time to recover some stolen property.

He rode in silence to the train station, trying to digest the information he had just learned. Rose was alive. Alive and . . . pregnant.

A deep scowl set in his jaw as he considered this. Rose had never let him touch her. There was only one other man whom that baby could possibly belong to. A dark look settled on Cal's face. Rose had a lot of explaining to do. The thought that she had actually let that gutter rat touch her intimately . . . it disgusted him beyond limits.

Continued in Chapter 9!

End  
file.